

Great Dismal Swamp
National Wildlife Refuge
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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<http://www.fws.gov>

April 2001



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Dismal Swamp

*National Wildlife
Refuge*

American black bear
Waverley Traylor

*“A gift to the
American
people —
forever.”*

A Unique and Mysterious Place



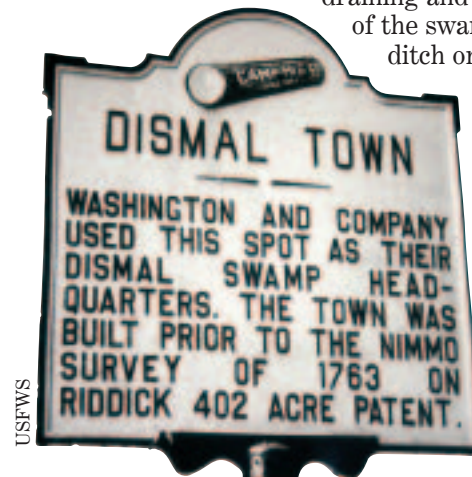
This blue goose, designed by J.N. “Ding” Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Welcome to Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is located in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. Creation of the refuge began in 1973 when the Union Camp Corporation donated 49,100 acres of land to The Nature Conservancy. The land was then transferred to the Department of the Interior, and the refuge was officially established through the Dismal Swamp Act of 1974. The refuge consists of over 109,000 acres of forested wetlands that have been greatly altered by drainage and repeated logging operations. Lake Drummond, a 3,100-acre natural lake, is located in the heart of the swamp.

Amazing History of Human Involvement

Human occupation of the Great Dismal Swamp began nearly 13,000 years ago. By 1650, few Native Americans remained in the area, and European settlers showed little interest in the swamp. In 1665, William Drummond, governor of North Carolina, discovered the lake that now bears his name. William Byrd II led a surveying party into the swamp to draw a dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina in 1728. George Washington first visited the swamp in 1763 and organized the Dismal Swamp Land Company that was involved in draining and logging portions of the swamp. A five-mile ditch on the refuge’s west side still bears his name.

The Great Dismal Swamp has been drastically altered by humans over the past two centuries. Agricultural,



Historical Sign



Old railroad bed
USFWS

commercial, and residential development destroyed more than half of the swamp. Logging proved to be a successful commercial activity, with regular operations continuing as late as 1976. The entire swamp has been logged at least once, and many areas have been burned by periodic wildfires. Before the refuge's establishment, more than 140 miles of roads were constructed to provide timber access. These roads severely disrupted the swamp's natural hydrology, the ditches excavated to provide soil for the road beds dried out the swamp. The roads also blocked the water's natural flow across the swamp's surface, flooding some areas of the swamp with stagnant water. After the logging operations, red maple and other forest types replaced many stands of cypress and Atlantic white cedar. A drier swamp and the suppression of wildfires, which cleared the land for new seed germination, created conditions less favorable to the survival of cypress and cedar. As a result, plant and animal diversity decreased.



Flooded swamp

Waverley Taylor

**Resource Management—
Striving to
preserve, protect
and restore
a unique
ecosystem**

The primary purpose of the refuge's resource management programs is to restore and maintain the natural biological diversity that existed prior to the alterations caused by humans. Essential to the swamp ecosystem are its water, native vegetative

Railroad/ West Marsh
USFWS





Water control structure
USFWS

communities, and varied wildlife. Water is being conserved and managed by placing water control structures in the ditches. Plant diversity is being restored and maintained through forest management activities that simulate the ecological effects of wildfire. Wildlife is managed by ensuring the presence of required habitats, with hunting used to balance specific wildlife populations with food supplies.

Wildlife and Plant Diversity

Plant Communities

Five major forested types and three non-forested plant communities comprise the swamp's vegetation. The forested types include pine, Atlantic white cedar, maple-blackgum, tupelo-baldcypress and sweetgum-oak poplar. The non-forested types include a remnant marsh, a sphagnum bog and an evergreen shrub community. Currently red maple is the most abundant and widely distributed plant community; it expands into

USFWS



Dwarf trillium

other communities due to the lingering effects of past logging, extensive draining and forest fire suppression. Tupelo-baldcypress and Atlantic white cedar, formerly dominant forest types, currently account for less than 20 percent of the total cover. Three rare species of plants deserving special mention are the dwarf trillium, silky camellia, and log fern. The dwarf trillium is located in the northwestern section of the swamp and blooms briefly each year for a two-week period in March. Silky camellia is found on hardwood ridges and in the northwestern corner of the refuge. The log fern, one of the rarest American ferns, is more common in the Great Dismal Swamp than anywhere else in the country.

Fern
Waverley Traylor





Waverley Traylor

American goldfinch

Birds

More than 200 bird species have been identified since the refuge's establishment, ninety-six of which have been reported as nesting on or near the refuge. Birding is best during spring migration from April

to June when the greatest diversity of species (particularly warblers) occurs. Two southern species, the Swainson's warbler and Wayne's warbler (a race of the black-throated green warbler), are more common in the Great Dismal Swamp than in other coastal locations. Winter brings massive movements of blackbirds and robins to the swamp.

Thousands of ducks, geese and swans can be seen on Lake Drummond during the winter months. Other

Pileated woodpecker



Waverley Traylor



Opossum

Waverley Traylor

Bobcat



Waverley Traylor

birds of interest are the wood duck, barred owl, pileated woodpecker, bald eagle and prothonotary warbler.

Mammals

The swamp supports a variety of mammals including otter, bats, raccoon, mink, gray and red foxes, and gray squirrel. White-tailed deer are common and, although rarely observed, black bear and bobcat inhabit the area.

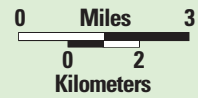
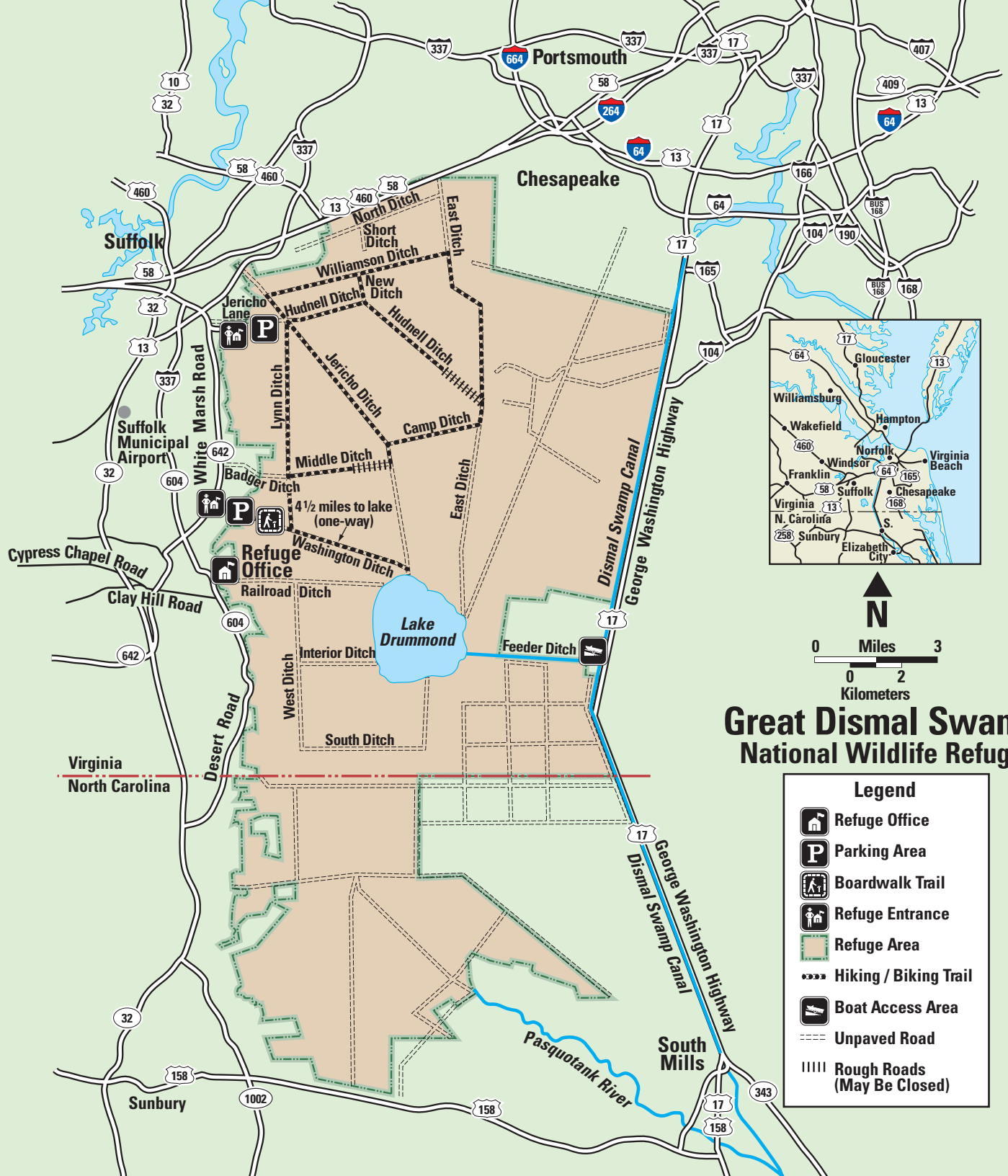
Reptiles and Amphibians

The Great Dismal Swamp provides habitat for a variety of reptiles and amphibians. Three species of

Red fox



Waverley Traylor



Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

- Legend**
- Refuge Office
 - Parking Area
 - Boardwalk Trail
 - Refuge Entrance
 - Refuge Area
 - Hiking / Biking Trail
 - Boat Access Area
 - Unpaved Road
 - Rough Roads (May Be Closed)



Green snake

poisonous snakes — cottonmouth, canebrake rattlesnake, and the more common copperhead — occur here, along with 18 nonpoisonous species. Yellow-bellied and spotted turtles are commonly found in ditches. An additional 56 species of turtles, lizards, salamanders, frogs and toads have been observed on the refuge.

Seasonal Calendar

Winter

Bear cubs (usually two) are born in late January through February. Great horned owls incubate eggs in late January and February. Red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks begin to court and lay eggs. Red maple trees flower in February. Waterfowl migrate with several thousand resting on Lake Drummond. Wood ducks pair up and search for nest cavities.



Green tree frog



American black bear



Waterfowl on Lake Drummond

Waverley Traylor

Spring

Dwarf trilliums bloom in mid-March. Wood ducks incubate their eggs in April. Migrating songbirds peak early in May, with warblers the most abundant. White-tailed fawns (usually twins) are born. An occasional osprey

visits the lake. Orchids, coral honeysuckle, yellow jessamine and yellow poplar are in flower. Cinnamon ferns develop fiddleheads. Silky camellia begin flowering in late May.



Wood duck

White-tailed deer fawn

Waverley Traylor

Summer

Black bears are active in early June as the breeding season peaks. White-tailed bucks are in velvet.





Red-Spotted Purple
USFWS

Kingfishers and great blue herons are active along ditches. More than fifty different species of butterflies have been observed on the refuge. Trumpet and passion vines bloom. The swamp is usually dry, with fire danger highest from June to October.

Fall

Autumn colors peak in late October through November. Large flocks of robins and blackbirds roost in the swamp. Wild fruits such as pawpaw, blackgum, devil's walking stick and wild grapes are abundant.

Canada Goose



Waverley Traylor



Visitor at the Lake

USFWS

Visitor Opportunities

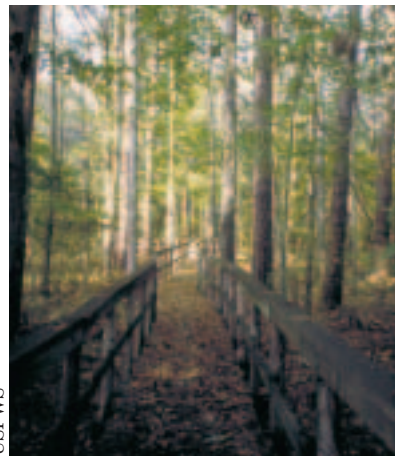
Visitors may participate in a variety of activities including hiking, biking, photography, wildlife observation, fishing and boating.



USFWS

The refuge was established for the purpose of protecting and managing the swamp's unique ecosystem which includes wildlife and habitat. As a result, portions of the refuge may be closed to public use, such as during the fall hunting season. Additional information on the hunting season is available at the refuge office.

Above: Biking on the trail
Below: Boardwalk Trail



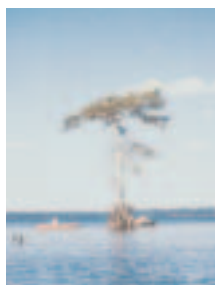
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Hiking/Biking

A variety of unpaved roads provide opportunities for hiking and biking with Washington Ditch Road the best suited for bicycle traffic. The Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail (handicapped accessible), located on



Lake Drummond



Canoeing on the lake

Washington Ditch Road, meanders almost a mile through a representative portion of the swamp.

Fishing/Boating

These activities are permitted year-round on Lake Drummond during daylight hours. To fish, a Virginia freshwater fishing license is required and state fishing regulations apply. Access is via the Feeder Ditch, which connects Lake Drummond with the Dismal Swamp Canal. A public boat ramp is located north of the Feeder Ditch (see inside map). Boats must be small enough to portage around the spillway near the lake. The lake is restricted to a 10 horsepower (or lower) boat motor limit. Fishing from the piers or bank is prohibited.

Hunting

A white-tailed deer hunt is held during the fall. Refuge permits are required. Portions of the refuge are closed during the hunt. Additional information is available from the refuge office.

Educational Opportunities

A refuge orientation, slide program, video and outdoor classroom activities are available to school,

civic, and professional groups. Advance reservations are required for all programs and may be made by phoning the refuge office. Vehicle access is permitted for research and outdoor classroom groups.

Kuralt Trail

The refuge is a designated site along the Kuralt Trail established in memory of Charles Kuralt, a distinguished radio and television journalist who often featured this area on his programs. The trail includes eleven national wildlife refuges and a national fish hatchery, which are all located within the Roanoke, Tar, Neuse, Cape Fear Ecosystem — named for the rivers which flow into the Albemarle, Currituck and Pamlico Sounds. These sites are working together to conserve fish, wildlife, plants and their native habitats. Some of the wildest lands in the mid-Atlantic are found within these areas.

Important Information for Visitors

To protect refuge resources and to ensure a safe and enjoyable visit, please note the following information. A complete listing of refuge regulations can be obtained from the refuge office.

Group on boardwalk USFWS





USFWS

Sunrise at the lake

- Refuge trails are open to hiking and biking only. Visitors must stay on designated trails.
- Collecting (includes catch and release) or harming any plant or animal life is prohibited. For your safety and the animals' protection do not attempt to handle or feed any wildlife.
- The Washington Ditch Entrance is open daily April 1– September 30, 6:30 am – 8:00 pm and October 1– March 31, 6:30 am – 5:00 pm. All other entrances are open daily from sunrise to sunset. No overnight use is permitted.
- Firearms and other weapons are prohibited except as authorized during refuge hunts.

Cypress tree at Lake Drummond



Waverley Traylor

- All pets must be kept on a hand-held leash at all times.
- Playback recorders are not permitted because they adversely affect wildlife behavior.
- “Area Closed” signs are used to inform the public that the designated area is closed to all entry.
- Please observe all signs while visiting the refuge.

Refuge Hours

Office Hours—located at 3100 Desert Road (Rt. 604)—open Monday–Friday from 8:00 am–3:30 pm. Closed all federal holidays.

Washington Ditch Entrance—located off of White Marsh Road (Rt. 642)—open daily April 1– September 30, 6:30 am–8:00 pm and October 1– March 31, 6:30 am–5:00 pm.

Jericho Lane Entrance—located off of White Marsh Road (Rt. 642)—open daily from sunrise to sunset.

Directions to the Refuge

From the north: South of downtown Suffolk, VA, on Rt. 13 to Rt. 32, south for 4.5 miles, then follow refuge signs.

From the south: Take Rt. 32 north towards Suffolk. Follow refuge signs.

Great Dismal Swamp is one of more than 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The Service also manages National Fish Hatcheries, and provides Federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.